

Why is My Child Different?

Tongan beliefs about the causes of disability

There are many common beliefs in Tonga about the causes of disability, like...

...that the mother or father sinned, and so their baby carries a “curse”

...that God has chosen the child to have a disability in order to teach the family a lesson

...that a ghost has come and made the child have a disability



These beliefs are strong and important for many people. However, these beliefs often bring shame on the family and child with disability and prevent them from leading happy and full lives.



This fact sheet describes some *other* beliefs about how disability is caused.

Some babies are born with a disability because of something that happens before they are born...

...because of having a different number of chromosomes (like for babies with Down Syndrome).

...because of something that happened to the mother during pregnancy, like the mother having an illness (for example Rubella – which can cause the baby to be deaf).

Some babies get a disability because of something that happens during birth...

...if they do not breathe quickly when they are born or if the baby's birth is very difficult

...if a dirty blade is used to cut the cord or the baby is born in a dirty environment

...if the baby is born very early

...if the mother or baby are very sick.



Some children get a disability because of something that happens during their life...

...if the baby or child gets very sick, if it is not immunised and doesn't go to the clinic or is not checked by the community nurse

...if the baby has an accident and hurts its head, or if someone hits and injures the baby (babies have soft heads that need protection)

Sometimes no one knows why the baby has a disability...

...for a large number of babies there is no known cause of disability.

When there is no known cause people often blame each other for the baby's disability.



The most important thing for all babies and children with disability – regardless of what caused their disability – is that we all need to work together and help them live full and happy lives, joining in as much as possible.

We must also all help to provide support so the family feels included in the community and do not feel shame.